Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

POLICY BRIEF No. 2

KNOWLEDGE FOR GREAT GREEN WALL ACTION

2026

LEARNING NEEDS AND PRIORITIES FOR AFRICA'S GREAT GREEN WALL

KEY LEARNING GAPS FOR THE GREAT GREEN WALL

- Technical learning needs and adoption of good practices for large scale land restoration.
- Process learning needs to design methods of stakeholder engagement and collaborative project planning and delivery.
- Innovative monitoring and evaluation (M&E) learning needs including database management, biophysical and socio-economic baseline and progress assessments.
- Value chain development of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) learning needs for products development and marketing.
- Managerial and coordination learning needs for institutions and community organizations.

This policy brief provides a summary of key learning gaps hindering the effective implementation of the Great Green Wall (GGW) initiative. It is based on a review of different capacity assessments and reports, as well as 15 years of FAO experience supporting countries implementing the GGW. It was produced through the *Knowledge for Great Green Wall Action* (K4GGWA) Programme.

Why is capacity development crucial to achieve the Great Green Wall?

The GGW is an ambitious pan African initiative to combat desertification and land degradation. The challenge is immense, and to meet these goals, GGW countries and stakeholders need to have the appropriate capacities at all levels. Capacity development is understood to be the process whereby individuals, organizations and society as a whole create, adapt, strengthen and maintain capacity over time. It has traditionally been associated with knowledge transfer and training of individuals, but is a complex, non-linear and long-term change process. For better sustainability and ownership, capacity development should be driven by country actors, consistent with national priorities and the local context, and anchored in national systems and local expertise.

The GGW requires developing technical skills in sustainable land management and restoration practices, such as planting, maintenance and management of restored areas, forest seed collecting and nursery techniques, as well as monitoring the impact of those activities. It also requires appropriate functional capacities, or "soft skills" that are vital to ensure the sustainability of efforts such as knowledge and information sharing, partnership building, communication, participatory processes, advocacy and resource mobilization.

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This lack of knowledge, skills and organizational capacity can be addressed through learning support. FAO and CIFOR-ICRAF, through the K4GGWA programme, focus on long-term capacity development through training, mentoring and collaborative learning. The programme aims to support capacity development of GGW stakeholders to achieve its objectives. It focusses on giving key groups the tools and knowledge they need to share information better, create national data systems, encourage discussions within and between countries, and strengthen organizations that work on the GGW at national and regional levels.

How were these capacity and learning needs assessed?

Multiple capacity assessments and other projects and workshops over the past decade have exposed knowledge gaps and organizational challenges that hinder the effective implementation of the GGW. For example, through the Action Against Desertification (AAD) programme, GGW countries were supported to identify, assess and prioritize their capacity needs in land restoration and sustainable land management by engaging a wide array of stakeholders at local, national, regional and international levels. This includes government, civil society, women's and producer organizations, technical organizations, research institutes and local communities.

This policy brief draws on these various assessments to propose a summary of capacity and learning needs. A total of 32 learning needs have been identified as priorities for implementing the GGW.

The 32 key learning needs for the Great Green Wall

1. Large-scale land restoration techniques

Learning topic	Target group
1.1 Rainwater harvesting and large-scale land preparation techniques (mechanized, animal traction, manual)	Tractor drivers, mechanics, village technicians
1.2 Quality restoration seeds collection, handling, storage, germination techniques	Forestry research, forest seed centers, community seeds suppliers, village technicians
1.3 Nursery techniques and management, tree multiplication/ propagation techniques including innovative techniques (i.e. inoculation with mycorrhizae and rhizobia)	Communities/land users, village restoration technicians
1.4 Restoration species selection and prioritization for enrichment planting (seedlings and direct seeding) techniques	Communities/land users, village restoration technicians
1.5 Farmer managed natural regeneration (FMNR) (assisted), learning types of FMNR and where to implement FMNR practices, people, species and monitoring, harnessing benefits and scaling movements	Farming communities, pastoralists, rural advisory services, community-based organizations (CBOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), extensionists
1.6 Agroforestry (covers 1.1-1.5) Relevant learning topics to be prioritized: ● Agroforestry systems and practices; ● Tree species choices and site/niche matching; ● Integrated land-use systems with trees and crops; ● Multistorey tree gardens, Parklands systems; ● Soil, water management and cropping systems; ● Agro-sylvo-pastoral systems, Home gardens and fruit farming; ● Developing tree growing plans for carbon; ● Gender and agroforestry; ● Improving and maintaining tree species diversity	Farming communities, pastoralists, rural advisory services, CBOs, NGOs, extensionists
1.7 Social fencing and plots protection, fire control and prevention, windbreaks, managed natural regeneration of native species (trees, shrubs, grasses), agroforestry, biological and mechanical dune fixation, etc.	Communities/land users, local municipalities, village technicians
1.8 Protection of roads and other infrastructure from the desert by dune-fixing and similar activities	Local municipalities, Communities/land users, village technicians
1.9 Sensitization and education on environmental issues and sustainable practices	Producers, CBOs, NGOs, policy makers, local authorities, school children, civil society, etc.
1.10 Compensation from companies and projects that destroy/remove the plant/vegetation cover (mines, roads, infrastructure, etc.)	GGW managers/coordinators, project implementors

2. Monitoring and evaluation

Learning topic	Target group
2.1 Using the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system of the Pan-African (PA) GGW, common set of biophysical indicators to monitor and report on GGW interventions; establishing a biophysical baseline and measuring changes/impacts and progress	M&E officers, GGW national entities and coalitions, scientific and technical institutions Civil society and community
2.2 Assessing the drivers, extent and scale of ecosystem degradation and restoration opportunities (including land degradation neutrality and land/soil health)	M&E officers, GGW national entities and coalitions, scientific and technical institutions
2.3 Remote sensing/Geographic Information Systems (GIS) monitoring tools including FAO's Collect Earth tools, Africa Open Data for Environment, Agriculture and Land (DEAL) database, FAO GGW restoration monitoring App	M&E officers, GGW national entities, scientific and technical institutions
2.4 Using field tools for mapping (Geographic Positioning Systems, GPS) and reporting on restoration sites, environmental data collection and analysis	M&E officers, GGW national entities, scientific and technical institutions, technicians
2.5 Using carbon/Greenhouse Gas (GHG) accounting tools such as EX-ACT (Environment Externalities Accounting Tool), NEXT (Nationally Determined Contributions Expert Tool) and Africa Open DEAL for estimations and reporting on CO2 pools and additionalities through land restoration	M&E officers, GGW national entities, scientific and technical institutions
2.6 Interpretation and use of monitoring and evaluation data	GGW national entities, civil society, government ministries
2.7 Using the M&E system of the PA-GGW common set of socio-economic indicators (livelihoods, feed, food and nutrition security, health improvement, etc.) to monitor and report on GGW interventions. Establishing a socio-economic baseline, measuring restoration progress and assessing restoration socio-economic impacts.	M&E officers, GGW national entities, scientific and technical institutions
2.8 Innovative socio-economic monitoring and assessment tools: household surveys, household sampling techniques, digital tools (e.g. KOBO), data analysis, etc.	M&E officers, GGW national entities, scientific and technical institutions, technicians, facilitators
2.9 Collecting information on preferred/useful plant species and their uses including traditional knowledge in the management of natural resources	M&E officers, GGW national entities and coalitions, civil society, CBOs, NGOs, scientific and technical institutions, technicians, facilitators

3. Value chain development

Learning topic	Target group
3.1 FAO's Market Analysis and Development (MA&D) approach for producers, business planning and management	Producers and entrepreneurs, Producer Organizations (POs), CBOs, facilitators, GGW national entities
3.2 Set-up and management of producers' associations, youth and women's groups (organization and functional capacity)	Producers and entrepreneurs, POs, CBOs, facilitators, GGW national entities and coalitions
3.3 Assessment of potentials, restorative exploitation and sustainable collection, processing, packaging and marketing of key NTFPs in the GGW (fodder, balanites products, gum arabic, honey, forest foods, etc.)	Producers and entrepreneurs, POs, CBOs, GGW national entities and coalitions, M&E officers, civil society, NGOs, scientific and technical institutions, technicians, facilitators

4. Managerial and coordination learning needs

Learning topic	Target group
4.1 Creation and functioning of grassroots community organizations including community mobilization and sensitization, identification of agreed areas to restore, setting-up management committees for the management of restored areas (organization and functional capacity)	Communities, municipalities, extension workers
4.2 Integrating restoration activities and restorative exploitation of natural resources in local development plans	Communities, municipalities, extension workers
4.3 Land use conflict prevention and mediation related to tenure, management and exploitation of natural resources	Communities, municipalities, extension workers
4.4 Engagement, facilitation, negotiation skills related to stakeholder relations, workshops,	Civil society, GGW agencies, government ministries

processes for planning, policy and reflection	
4.5 Management capacities and managerial skills (technical, financial, communication, advocacy, etc.	Managers of GGW agencies
4.6 Mobilizing all types of restoration/climate finance including non-traditional or innovative funding, development banks, climate finance and the private sector investments including carbon finance	Communities, producer organizations, NGO's, private sector
4.7 Develop bankable/eligible GGW/climate action projects (adaptation and mitigation) including by assessing the costs and benefits of restoration interventions	Governments, Ministries of Environment, GGW national coalitions
4.8 Successfully engaging in policy networks and navigating across levels and scales of decision making	Community leaders, civil societies, local governments/municipalities, GGW local and national coalitions
4.9 Building capacities and momentum for advocacy, and policy reform (key issues regulatory/policy issues will be identified during the policy analysis that will be conducted by the FAO in K4GGWA objective 3.1.4.)	Influential stakeholders, public figures and organizations in the GGW countries including CSOs, Parliament
4.10 Training forestry service staff and leadership on the regulations, laws related to agroforestry/ Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR)/tree rights (and their gaps) as well as the implications of these for accelerating land restoration. the aim being to raise their awareness with evidence and incite behavioral shifts in favor of meaningful reform in the Sahel.	Forestry services staff and leadership that have influence, and are forward looking.

List of documents reviewed

Strategy and Action plan for capacity development in support of the implementation of the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel initiative	2013
Action Against Desertification capacity assessment workshop reports (Burkina Faso, Gambia, Ethiopia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal)	2015-2016
GCF/FAO-GGW multi-country project building resilience in the Great Green Wall of Africa - synthesis of the national workshops' proceedings & content proposals for component 3	2020
The Great Green Wall: Implementation status & way ahead to 2030 and Needs for Technical Assistance in GGW Countries Survey with GGW Focal Points (Nov. 2021 – Jan. 2022)	2020-2022
Global capacity needs assessment: key gaps and capacity priorities for restoration to support the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030	2021
ACReSAL training of trainer's capacity assessment report	2024
Regreening Africa final report (https://regreeningafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/RegreeningAfrica-Final-Report_29Aug-ONLINE.pdf)	2023
Audit reports on PA-GGW and NA-GGW	2025

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